

Having seen African lions in East Africa and Indian lions in the Gir Forest, I have immense respect for these creatures. And having seen tigers in various parts of India, I have the highest admiration for these. Both animals in their own different ways and in their own different habitats are equally worthy of our admiration. I would rather think of them as mutually respecting and avoiding each other if they happened to meet in the wild state.

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August 20, 1956.

E. P. GEE

3. TRANSFERRING OF THE INDIAN LION TO AN ADDITIONAL LOCALITY

There has been much thought given recently to the moving of lions from the Gir Forest to other parts of their former range. The idea no doubt is to insure the future of this noble animal from possible extinction by man or through epidemic diseases or other natural catastrophies, and as such is to be welcomed. Is there however, any need to do this at all?

In the Gir Forest the lions live out in the surrounding cultivation and less in the forest itself, except in the eastern part of the reserve. Lions are animals of the open country and do not like forests. That they are found in the Gir is no doubt owing to the broken nature of the terrain which allowed the last of the animals' shelter from the shikaris who wiped them out over the rest of the country, and possibly also due to the great numbers of cattle grazed in the forest, providing them with a plenty of food. In former times the lions ranging across the north-west of India must have fed on nilgai and buck which were found in plenty in the areas frequented by the lions. Now where is there a place where these antelopes can be found in the concentrated numbers sufficient to support a pride of lions? As in the case of tiger, cattle are a substitute in place of the lion's natural food, while other forest game such as cheetal can never form the sole diet of the lion. Bearing this in mind, would it be fair to impose economic loss on people living around the proposed new lion sanctuary, and has the danger to these people who are not familiar with the lion and his ways been considered? Finally, what will prevent the lions from wandering away as they apparently did when some were introduced by the Maharaja of Gwalior in his forests several decades ago? These are questions which cannot be lightly dismissed. Another problem which needs to be looked into before trapping of the lions commences is that of housing them while the full family is being caught, and till they are moved to their new home. It is obvious that the present accommodation in the Junagadh Zoo is limited

and not desirable, since I have found there a tendency among the keepers and some visitors to annoy the animals. This infuriates the lions, which is only natural, as well as removes the respect they have for man in their natural state. What the consequences will be when these animals are released in their new home is too fearful to imagine—witness the killings by the lions which recently escaped from the Junagadh Zoo.

Granted that all the above objections are removed, on what grounds has the need for this sort of transplanting become necessary? Lions have existed in the Gir for centuries and even if in the past epidemics might have reduced the race, they have always managed to multiply again to their former numbers, so it has never been claimed that the present reduction of the once widely spread lion to its limited habitat has resulted from causes other than their destruction by man and by depopulating of the game that comprised their food. Since the killing of lions has been completely banned, the Gir lions have kept on increasing most vigorously, and there is every possibility that if the animals are given continued protection, they will slowly spread out into the country around their present range. This natural increase will create a need to keep their numbers down by judicious shooting. It is therefore apparent that there need be no anxiety about possible extinction of the lion in the Gir and consequently this scheme is quite uncalled for, unless of course it is intended to give another State the pride of being the possessor of Asiatic Lions. This privilege, however, is fraught with much danger and is not worth the effort.

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[Mr. E. P. Gee, who is particularly interested in this problem, comments on the above as follows:

‘While it is true that the Gir Forest and its surroundings may be an ideal habitat for Indian lions, this is not the sole reason for their survival there. Another reason is that they were protected by the former Nawab of Junagadh, whereas they never received any protection in any other part of India.

As to imposing an “economic loss on people living around the proposed new lion sanctuary”, the importance of doing publicity about the lion and its habits in the event of a new home for the Indian lion being proposed, was accepted and emphasised at the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life. Only if the State authorities and the people of the neighbourhood are in favour of having lions brought into their area should such a project be undertaken.

The case of (African) lions being introduced into Gwalior State some years ago cannot fairly be cited, as the conditions under which these lions were released into the forest were far from ideal.

In addition to chital, it is presumable that sambar, pig and other such animals will also constitute the food of lions re-introduced into